



*Celebrating a  
Century  
of Conservation!*

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

# America's National Wildlife Refuge System

## *Facts*

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's most unique network of lands and waters set aside specifically for conservation of fish, wildlife and plants. President Theodore Roosevelt established the first refuge, 3-acre Pelican Island Bird Reservation in Florida's Indian River Lagoon, in 1903. Roosevelt went on to create 55 more refuges before he left office in 1909.

The refuge system continued to expand and today it encompasses more than 500 units spread over nearly 94 million acres. As the National Wildlife Refuge System prepares to mark its centennial in 2003, the system has refined its mission to put wildlife conservation first while providing recreation and education opportunities for a growing number of visitors—more than 35 million last year alone.

The National Wildlife Refuge System includes:

- 535 refuges, several thousand waterfowl production areas and 51 coordination areas.
- Important habitat for more than 700 bird species, 220 mammals, 250 reptile and amphibian species, and more than 200 species of fish.
- A wide variety of special management areas such as wilderness, research natural areas, wetlands of international importance, wild and scenic rivers, and national natural landmarks.
- Hundreds of refuges located along the four major migration corridors, or "flyways," for waterfowl and other birds. These refuges serve as vital breeding, feeding and resting places for millions of birds on their long annual migrations.

- 21 national wildlife refuges designated as Class I areas under the Clean Air Act. These areas—including Cape Romain NWR in South Carolina, Georgia's Okefenokee NWR and Moosehorn NWR in northern Maine—receive the highest levels of air quality protection.

The refuge system provides habitat for 180 threatened and endangered animal species, and 78 threatened or endangered plants. Fifty-six refuges have been acquired principally under authority of the Endangered Species Act, including Florida's Crystal River (manatees), Oklahoma Bat Caves (endangered bats), Hakalau Forest in

Hawaii (endangered Hawaiian birds) and Ash Meadows in Nevada (12 species of plants and fish).

The refuge system attracts more than 35 million visitors annually who engage in wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, recreational fishing and wildlife watching:

- 98 percent of the land in the refuge system is open to the public.
- Environmental education programs occur on 230 field stations.
- Hunting programs are offered on nearly 300 refuges.
- Fishing is allowed on some 260 refuges.

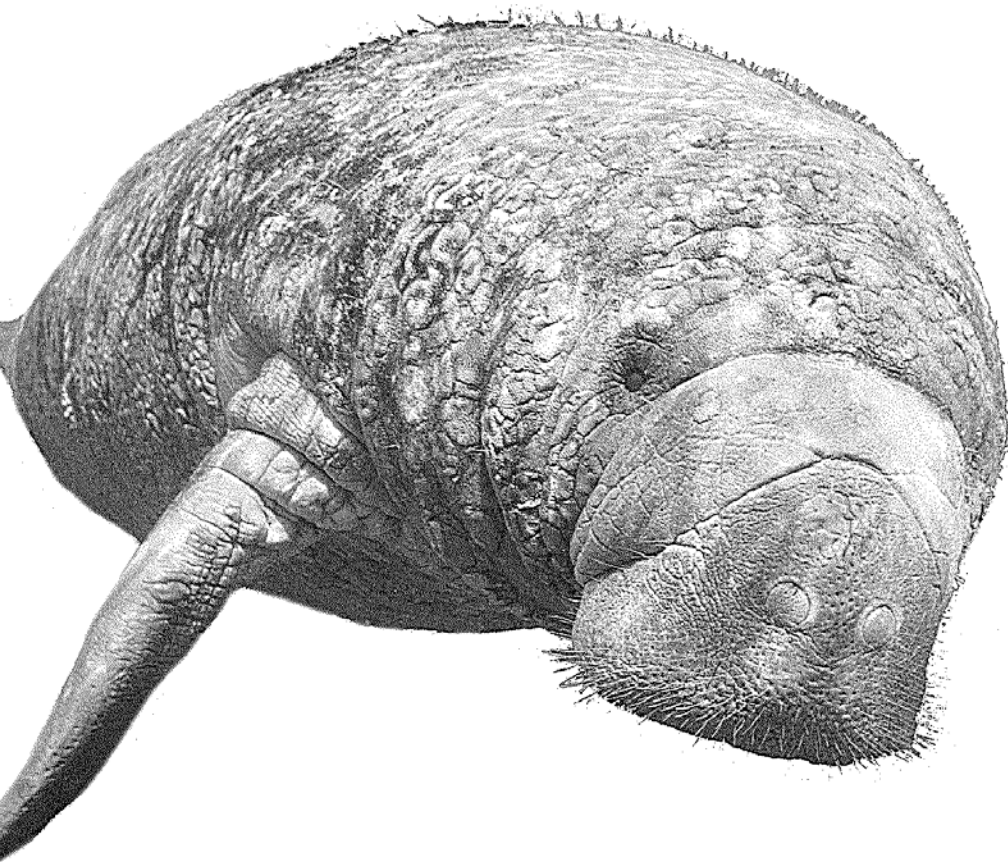


**Other Refuge System Facts:**

- Superimposed over the lower 48 states, the 3.6 million acres of islands in Alaska Maritime NWR would stretch from California to Florida.
- The 500th national wildlife refuge, Canaan Valley in West Virginia, is the highest valley east of the Rocky Mountains.
- The smallest refuge is the half-acre Mille Lacs NWR in Minnesota, and the largest is Alaska's Arctic NWR, at 19.2 million acres.
- North Dakota has the most refuges of any state—64—followed by California (38) and Florida (29).
- A number of national wildlife refuges are named for famous people such as authors (Mark Twain NWR in Illinois and Missouri and Rachel Carson NWR in Maine), artists (Audubon NWR in North Dakota) and politicians (Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in New England and Sonny Bono Salton Sea in California).
- While 96 percent of the National Wildlife Refuge System units are located in the lower 48 states, Hawaii and U.S. territories, 85 percent of the system's acreage is in Alaska.
- One of the largest swamps in the United States, 600-square-mile Okefenokee NWR in Georgia, is a Wetland of International Importance and home to 15,000 alligators and carnivorous plants.
- Prehistoric loggerhead turtles co-exist with high-tech space shuttles at Merritt Island NWR in Florida, which lies adjacent to NASA's Cape Canaveral. Merritt Island refuge also has more kinds of endangered species than any other refuge, including bald eagles, wood storks and manatees.

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